

Visitors' response to protest is mixed

By Beth Minneci
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PLYMOUTH — When Ann Dyll of Rockwell, Texas, called the Plymouth Chamber of Commerce for a Thanksgiving Day events list, no one mentioned the Native Americans' scheduled Day of Mourning demonstration, Dyll said.

"They told us about the Pilgrims Progress march, that there would be a re-enactment march through the streets," Dyll said. "They said you could join in on that and sing during their service and that a traditional Thanksgiving dinner would be served in restaurants throughout town."

The Day of Mourning has been a day of protest by Native Americans on Thanksgiving in Plymouth for 29 years, but this year was the first that town officials recognized it the event.

This year was also the first time since 1994 that Native American demonstrators and their supporters have not disrupted the Pilgrims Progress march as it wound through downtown.

Last year, 25 demonstrators were arrested after marching down Leyden Street without a permit and clashing with police after ignoring orders to clear the street.

"The kids heard about it last night on the radio," Dyll said. "It didn't deter us at all from coming down."

The Dylls were among about 300 people who watched the Pilgrims Progress re-enactors' annual worship service on top of Burial Hill. The annual ritual honors May-



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Anaki, a Ponkapoag Indian from Brockton, at the gathering yesterday in Plymouth.

flower survivors who first made the march in 1621 and those that perished in the harsh winter of 1620-1621.

It mainly attracted out-of-town visitors who wanted to celebrate Thanksgiving Day in "America's Hometown."

Anne Marie Lerou moved to the United States from Belgium 14 years ago in search of a better job. Her husband is a researcher for DuPont Co. Their children are in college.

"We are very happy here," Lerou said. "This is the heart of the American celebration of Thanksgiving. America has been very good to us as a country, so we feel we need to celebrate this."

An hour later on Cole's Hill, United American Indians of New England co-leader Moonanum

James told nearly 1,000 people that he was proud the town of Plymouth recently agreed to fund a Native American educational project.

James said later that he does not ever want to repeat the confrontation of last year, but that the nationwide publicity it received may have promoted social change.

"If people hadn't gotten in the streets in the 1770s, the queen of England's picture might still be on our money," he said. "Sometimes it takes something like what happened last year to galvanize, if you will, the people's struggle."

Spectators yesterday had mixed reactions about last year's clash and its repercussions.

Darla Patriacca of Marshfield and her family tour Plymouth every Thanksgiving Day. Yesterday, they shielded themselves from the rain under an awning on Court Street, blocks away from the rally.

"I really don't know what they're protesting," Patriacca said, adding that last year's Indian demonstration was a display of self-righteousness. "Last year, they blocked the entrance to the church. It was very disrespectful. The (re-enactment) is paying respect to the Pilgrims who started this country, and it's a great country."

The protesters maintain that Thanksgiving represents the suppression of Native American culture.

India native Arunava Goswami, 32, and his wife, Srabani, drove to Plymouth from Boston to learn more about the root of the conflict. Arunava Goswami said centuries-old strife over land ownership and

ethnicity is common throughout the world.

Mike Silva, 28, of Manomet and Daniel Holmes, 25, of Plymouth were among people rallying at Cole's Hill.

"We've lived here since the day we were born," Silva said. "Basically, we didn't grow up knowing anything about the Native Americans in history. The King Philip's War was never mentioned. It's interesting."

King Philip's War was named for Metacom, the son of the Wampanoag Chief Massasoit. Metacom declared war on the settlers in 1675 because he feared they would exterminate the Indians.

Silva and Holmes said they would not march with the Native Americans but would stand with them on Cole's Hill to give them some support and because they were curious.

Marshfield resident Maryellen Bean, 44, and her family were also drawn to the hill by a desire to learn.

"There was peace for 50 years, and these Pilgrims of the 1600s weren't involved in the oppression, but it's still a good reminder of what happened in later years, when the Indians got the short end of the stick," said Bean, who teaches adult education in Quincy.

Anne Toomey of Canton listened to the demonstrators speak and left Cole's Hill annoyed.

"I don't think they have an issue," Toomey said. "What I hear at work is that they don't have a leg to stand on. Maybe if I was an Indian I'd feel differently."

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